

Key Ideas from the Keys to Quality Accreditation Project



Key Idea: **Keys to Quality Relationship to SALT** by Amy Cohen, RI Department of Education

Some of our sites have asked about the relationship between the SALT (School Accountability for Learning and Teaching) Survey, required of all RI public schools in response to Budget Article 31, and self study surveys of the NAEYC accreditation process. Although both are self study tools involving completion of surveys by administrators, teachers, and families, the content and scope are different. However, the core of both is the recognition and belief that for children to be well-prepared to benefit from learning experiences, the climate of programs must be welcoming and supportive of all students and their families and that all programs need valid, reliable information to plan and create learning environments to promote high levels of adjustment and achievement.

When the General Assembly passed Budget Article 31 in summer, 1997, it required school districts to collect information on finances, achievement, and school accountability for learning and teaching. The SALT survey (SALT process self-study tool) measures variables in dimensions of school functioning such as family involvement, school climate, student experiences, and community partnerships. As schools examine results reported from families, staff, and students, they must decide what elements need attention so that their structures support such features as integrative instruction, engaged families or personalized learning communities. Collectively, these data inform and focus the school improvement planning process to help schools ensure all students achieve at high levels.

The NAEYC accreditation process is designed for early care and education programs, preschools, kindergartens and before- and after-school programs. Information about whether a program meets nationally recognized criteria for high quality is also collected through various sources: parent questionnaire, administrator's report, classroom observation, and staff survey. NAEYC defines a high quality program as one that meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children and adults who are involved in the program.

Although criteria examine all aspects of the program, emphasis is placed on the quality of interactions amongst the staff and children and the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum and what really happens to the children. Health and safety, staffing and qualifications, administration and physical environment are all reviewed in accreditation, but the primary consideration is the nature of the child's experiences.

Self-study tools of these different, yet complimentary, processes provide valuable mechanisms for examining and improve teaching practices and learning experiences that occur within programs.

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